

Disaster center to open Friday

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The Kerrville Daily Times

Published July 11, 2002

Federal Emergency Management Agency officials will be in Kerrville Friday to open a Disaster Relief Center to help local residents and business owners impacted by last week's floods.

FEMA information officer Bill Lindsay announced Wednesday that the relief center will be open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, until further notice at Trinity Baptist Church.

FEMA personnel will be on hand to meet with flood victims to answer questions and provide recovery information and written materials about various assistance programs. Among the disaster programs available are temporary housing assistance, individual and family grants, low interest Small Business Administration loans, disaster un-employment assistance and crisis counseling.

"This is a great opportunity for people in Kerrville and Kerr County to sit down with the different agencies and get their recovery questions answered," said Mindy Wendele, City of Kerrville spokeswoman. "Although the Disaster Recovery Center will open Friday, it is extremely important for individuals and businesses to call the FEMA disaster number to begin the application process."

The FEMA disaster number is (800) 621-3362.

FEMA inspectors were in Kerrville again Wednesday, inspecting some damaged homes. According to Lindsay, FEMA has already received 44,000 inspection requests in Texas.

The number of individuals seeking relief from the floods across South Texas increased by more than 1,000 Tuesday, bringing the total to 5,855, he said. FEMA has already distributed \$1.8 million in relief in the form of emergency housing.

"The registration process is going rapidly," Lindsay said, adding that most registrations took between 5 and 7 minutes.

Aid also is available from the local chapter of the Red Cross, but flooding victims must interview with the Red Cross separately to receive aid from them, too.

Daletta Andreas, Hill Country chapter executive director, said the chapter has received calls from people who thought registering with FEMA or for cleanup services from local groups automatically registered them for Red Cross services. That's incorrect, Andreas said.

"They need to come in and go through our interview process," she said.

The Red Cross service center, 333 Earl Garrett St., is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, and will be open this weekend, Andreas said.

People seeking assistance must provide identification proving they reside in the area.

Members of the State Bar of Texas are offering free legal advice for flood victims. Victims in Texas counties declared a federal disaster can call (800) 504-7030 for assistance with basic legal questions.

The free legal assistance hotline, operated in coordination with Texas Rural Legal Aid and volunteer lawyers from across the state, will be available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday.

"Once flood victims' immediate needs are met, they may encounter legal questions regarding lost documents, landlord-tenant disputes, or probate matters," said State Bar President Guy Harrison of Longview. "We want to do whatever we can to help Texans through this trying time."

Volunteer lawyers will offer basic advice, answer legal questions and provide appropriate referral information in both English and Spanish. Callers requiring more detailed advice or continuing legal representation may be referred to legal aid programs, pro bono attorneys or private attorneys.